

Over The Rhine: *Blood Oranges In The Snow*

Written by [Hal Horowitz](#) November 6th, 2014 at 11:26 am



Over the Rhine

Blood Oranges in the Snow

(Great Speckled Dog/Redeye)

Rating: 3 out of 5 stars

Many acts that have been together as long as Ohio's Over the Rhine (the band formed before their debut 1991 release) generally get around to releasing a Christmas set somewhere along the line. But in OTR's case, this is their *third* such offering, making them the reluctant kings of atmospheric folk-pop holiday non-cheer.

Fans of the group expect that songwriter/singer/multi-instrumentalist Linford Detweiler and vocalist/frontperson Karin Bergquist aren't here to tell you about the jollier exploits of Santa Claus, "Frosty the Snowman," "Jingle Bells" or "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer." Rather, as the somber cover art and the disc's title implies, OTR dive into the bleaker, darker aspects of this over-commercialized time of the year.

Their stories concern an alcoholic whose "soul feels as empty as a brown paper bag" conversely referring to the first snowfall of the year and a sinner looking for redemption in late December. These, subdued but not necessarily depressing slices of life encourage reflection and introspection after the parties have ended, examining Christmas from philosophical angles far different than the moldy, traditional fare most other artists stick with. What else would you expect from a band who once wrote a song called "All I Ever Get for Christmas is Blue"?

The three covers are from obscure sources with Merle Haggard's chilling "If We Make it Through December," delivered with somber sincerity, the only track that may be known in its original version. The closing, slow jazz "New Year's Song" offers a glimmer of hope for the next 12 months ("the future's bright/our past is checkered") for a couple whose relationship seems to have been rocky.

Bergquist is in typically stunning voice and the austere keyboard based arrangements help us focus on her nuances and subtleties. Detweiler's piano oriented acoustic melodies are shimmering yet muted, making this the go-to holiday duo for those that hate chirpy, upbeat seasonal music.

Later for the gingerbread, mistletoe and candy canes...now where's that Leonard Cohen Christmas album?